



## **Opening Statement: Budget Hearing 2021**

**Interim Chief Administrator: Andrea Kersten**

I want to first begin by saying I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to lead COPA at this very important moment for police reform, specifically here in the city of Chicago. I am honored to serve the city of Chicago and its residents; civilian and sworn.

As an agency of civilians charged with receiving complaints and investigating allegations of police misconduct, we view civilian oversight as a critical and important component of the broader police accountability system. Civilian oversight has the ability to usher in necessary reforms and serve as an instrument to advance the culture of policing. Perhaps most importantly, civilian oversight also gives a voice to impacted communities, builds trust in our systems of government, and further extends COPA as a bridge to our external stakeholders, advocates, and activists, as well as the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Cook County Public Defender's Office, Federal Bureau of Investigations, US Attorney's Office, and the Chicago Police Department, who are all connected to this work.

I have communicated to COPA's staff and publicly in numerous settings, that since COPA launched 4 years ago, there are certainly challenges we have undeniably faced. However, the gains in our investigative processes and outcomes, transparency, and community engagement, have positioned COPA and Chicago to be the city that the nation looks to as it relates to true civilian oversight. Our ability to release hundreds of materials to the public in accordance with City's Video Release Policy, conduct COPA's sixth COPA Academy, a 12-week core training curriculum for new investigators and attorneys, conclude investigations in nearly 600 cases through the second quarter of 2021, sustain over 40% of allegations against members of the Chicago Police Department, make substantial progress to improve policies and achieve greater compliance with the Consent Decree, and I am able to state publicly for the first time in COPA's four year history that we have completed the inherited backlog of open investigations of the prior civilian oversight agency – IPRA.

We are also excited about the emergence of our Policy Research and Analysis Division (PRAD) which has completed and delivered to the Chicago Police Department a correspondence,

advisory letter or pattern and practice investigation related to search warrants, SWAT record retention practices, body worn camera non-compliance, and feedback on its use of force training curriculum.

At COPA, we have some of the most talented and dedicated staff who understand the great responsibility that has been given to us. The responsibility to investigate allegations of excessive force, 4<sup>th</sup> amendment violations, verbal abuse, coercion, domestic violence, and sexual misconduct, as well to investigate all officer involved shootings and deaths. COPA will continue to meet this mandate and it is the reason we welcome the residents of Chicago, City Council, and others to hold us accountable.

Continuity and forward progress can be expected of us as we plow into the future. As the Interim Chief Administrator, my goal is to ensure that COPA delivers to the residents of Chicago, civilian oversight that can be trusted to conduct fair and thorough investigations built on our core values of integrity, transparency, independence, and timeliness.

While we have solidified ourselves as an agency that can conduct thorough investigation able to withstand scrutiny, a criticism noted in past Department of Justice and Police Accountability Task Force reports, but we are also excited to expand on our methodology in 2022 to include trauma informed interview practices that will take into consideration the emotional and psychological experiences of complainants and officers. Additionally, now is the time, after four years in operation, that we address the issue of timeliness that has recently become a criticism.

We hear you residents of the city of Chicago, Alderman, leaders, and stakeholders and are eager to talk about the upcoming initiatives that will directly impact timeliness which is a core function of our agency.

By implementing the new Video Release and Transparency Unit, COPA and the City of Chicago will be positioned to deliver on its obligations well in advance of the current mandated 60-day requirement of the City of Chicago's Video Release Policy, adequately manage requests for materials under Mayor Lightfoot's Executive Order 2021-1, and fulfill COPA's FOIA requests. This initiative, once implemented and fully staffed following budget approval, will no longer require investigators, legal and FOIA staff to shift priorities away from open investigations to fulfill transparency tasks. This will move COPA forward in significant ways and impact our legacy of timeliness in a positive way.

As an agency will continue to respond, show up, receive complaints, remain open to criticism and dialogue with partners. We will be transparent, conclude investigations, and make crucial policy and disciplinary recommendations. I further commit that we will continue to improve and refine COPA's performance in all of these important areas as Chicago's civilian oversight agency and a model to the country.

I thank you for this time and welcome your questions.